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MEASURE

2000

Sigrid Smith Craft

Matthew Eichas

Mary Fortman

Maura Giles

John David Groppe

Timothy Hayes

Brienne Hopkins

Lisa Koziol

Bree Ma'Ayteh

Christopher Nelson

Michael Nichols

Michelle Oberting

Lisa Phillips

Sara Post

Chrissy Scafide

Jon Szabo

Megan Taylor

MEASURE

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Parody of "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg

Chrissy Scafide

I saw the worst minds of my generation put on a pedestal by ignorant
peers, starving for attention, endlessly trying to get ahead in life by
pushing others down,

Who smoke weed and don't inhale because it's cool, later denying it
because they know it will make them look like a waste,

Who eat fancy expensive dinners that taste like crap because Mommy
and Daddy insist, later vomiting in the bathroom with golden toilets
and perfumes of all kinds, all to keep their girlish figure,

Who listen to the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix because they were told
were great but don't even know which one played at Woodstock,

Who get respectable grades because the cheat sheets have yet to be
found, and because the internet offers term papers at reasonably low
rates these days,

Who drink whiskey because it's rough and are man enough to handle
the cold tile of the bathroom floor on a Tuesday morning before class,

Who aren't concerned with politics because it takes up too much
precious time,

Who dye their hair and tan their skin and tuck their tummies so they
can be oblivious to what really lies underneath,

And who struggle endlessly with the awful truth that makes them fear
the light of day as well as the night.

Combing

Sigrid Smith Craft

I'm combing memories from my hair,
The mirror reflects a child-like stare
Dreaming of a world without a care
For mom, the flag and apple pie are there.

We buried Mom,
Despoiled the flag,
The apple pie's still there --
commercialized.

Prayer to Peter, the Fisherman

John D. Groppe

Impetuous Peter,
you were buoyed up for a time by your little faith.
Now reach out to us of even smaller faith,
pull us into your boat,
take us to shore,
light a fire to warm our sodden souls
and share your night's catch with us.
Tell us about the time you saw your friend with Moses and Elijah
And you knew that the Father had kept his ancient promise.
Buoy up our faith.
Teach us your impetuous patience.

Old Man

Lisa Phillips

An old man sits on a bench.
"It's a changing world," he tells me.
What he means is
It's a world changing without him.
The wind picks up
And my soul cries at the coming of winter.
Seeing it in my eyes and sighing,
He looks more like a yellowed picture
In a dusty photo album than what he is;
A man, who like me, once sat beside
An old dying man on a bench.

Birds of Prey
Michael Nichols

Her eyelashes beat like a raven's
Wings, black, fluttering, and furious,
Hungry for what's before them.
She's got the scavenger's touch,
The scent for carrion and the wounded,
A graceful viciousness in flight.

And when her tight lines and flowing form
Glide past your meek, doe-eyed stare,
Your mind felt her snare you
With the kind of look that makes Tantalus cry,
With the kind of smile that slithers into a
scandalous sigh.
So you decide to fly before you fall under the
predator's eye,
And you just keep walking.

Words of Love
Christopher Nelson

I am singin' all about the words of love,
All about dreams I dream of.

I am never going to give up the fight,
Going to love, night on night.

Miss, you gave up on me, gave up on you
You spoke words of love, words, which were never true.

You lied words of love
You swore on a million stars, swore to a million angels above.

You were the bright angel in my eyes
How I was so surprised

When I heard your words of love,
When nothing was true of a million dancin' doves.

All the words you have said
You left my soul empty, my heart dead.

This was you promise to the euphony of the angels above-
Your truth, your lies, your truth of words of love.

Afterwards

Lisa Phillips

Callused, shaking hands
Running through thinning hair,
A helpless, angry giant: my father
Glares at me – all of my eight years.

He was wrong to hit me.

We both know.

I triumph in the knowing
In spite of pain and tears.
The belt lies where it fell –
On the floor between us –
In a pool of cherry Kool-aid
From the glass I spilled.

Welts are forming
As I slowly pull up my jeans.

His full eyes fall.
In an hour, a day, he'll forget
That he stood before me here
Trembling with regret.

Carry Me (to Christine Taylor)

Megan Taylor

Carry me
I have walked so long
Trudging through streets of doubt
With guilt and solitude on my back

Carry me
Because even though I can
I have lost the will to want behind me
In my bags of hopes and dreams

Carry me
Remind me who I am
Understand, hear me out, tell me
That I have purpose and light

Carry me
Just over that hill
So that I can see the other side
That you can always find before me

Carry me
So I believe again.

Pretty Ugly

Brienne Hopkins

"Hey!" Sam yelled through the bathroom door.

"What? I'm busy," I answered back.

"Well, the door's locked and I need to brush my teeth," Sam said.

"Yeah, I need to do a lot of things too. So, why don't you wait your turn. You're always in here longer than me. Five minutes," I said with the confidence that can only come from behind a locked bathroom door.

"I have to leave for school in five minutes! Hurry it up!" she yelled. I laughed a little and glanced at the face staring me in the mirror.

I liked having the bathroom to myself. My sister was beautiful and all my efforts to make myself were diminished as soon as our two faces had to share the same mirror. She had this gorgeous dark hair and dark eyes. She was just the right size and had a cute smile to go along with it. I, on the other hand, was not tall or short, I was too fat, I had this awful dishwater color hair, and my nose wrinkled up when I smiled. There was a clear winner in this beauty contest, hands down.

"God, what's taking so long?" Sam yelled again.

"I'm not done yet. Wait your turn, Princess," I sneered back.

When I had time to look at myself I would compare my features to those of the movie stars I've seen on magazine covers. I had taken an inventory of what I had. Of course my comparisons were stretching it just a little, but all alone, I was the most beautiful face I had ever seen. I felt like Snow White with her magic mirror.

I had hair like Meg, lips like Cindy, a figure like Jennifer, teeth like Love, ears like Marilyn, and a smile like Courtney. That was perfect to me. My few moments of beauty before trudging out into the world of "ugly."

"Okay, you've had five minutes. Let me in!" My pest had returned.

I unlocked the door. I walked back over to the mirror to do one last check. I knew Sam was right behind me, but this time instead of greeting two faces in the mirror, I closed my eyes, turned around and walked out of the bathroom.

"Your hair looks nice today." Sam called from the bathroom.

A Wish on a Star

Timothy Hayes

looking into the black affectionate sky
trying to decide which is brighter
the moon or stars?
heaven up above looking down upon me
trying to make sure that i am ok
angels descending to the earth with grace
as i see from the heavens the small space
of greyness looking like it is twirling
trying to understand the mystery in th sky
a tear fell off my cheek as i was meant to weep
but instead i thought of the particular changes
people come and go
some die but others are slow
crying, sobbing, thinking, of the ugly happenings
trying to replace all thoughts
with happy, exciting, trustworthy hints
but not being able to burden those around us
instead looking back to the wondrous sky
seeing if any stars are moving in a form
or just plain standing there waiting for action
direction from the moon for the stars
like how the sun directs traffic during the day
just to stand up there and welcome the night
as we stand down here wondering what is happening,
but do we care?
looking for the star that wishes for me?
is there a true one
must it be?
well the star just wishes all that it is able to do,
the certain job it has for the galaxy
make the right wish and make someone happy
the star fell slowly with descending power
and someone's wish had come true.

The Sacred Statue

Lisa Koziol

"This is the church," my aunt said as my mother pulled into the parking lot.

The entire ride to the church my aunt had been talking about some miracle with a statue. I was only five at the time, and I didn't fully understand the concept of what we were going to see. My cousin Andrea did, or at least thought she did. She was the same age I was and she already thought she was an expert on the occurrence of miracles.

"We're going to see this statue of Jesus' mother, Mary," Andrea explained, "but it's not a real statue. It's really Mary pretending to be a statue and she's crying."

I was confused. How could a statue cry? I'd seen statues of Mary before. There was one in my church and one in my classroom at school. None of these statues cried. I didn't understand how this one could cry and the other ones didn't. Andrea said it was because the others were just statues. They weren't special ones.

I remember my aunt and my mom talking about experts to investigate this phenomenon. They tested theories of leaky pipes or condensation from the air of humid, old, church, but none of their theories proved anything. The statue cried.

Walking into the church, I was scared. I begged my mom not to make me go in, but she didn't listen. She picked me up and carried me in. We sat down in a pew a couple rows back from the statue. I took one look at the statue, saw its face streaked with tears, and hid myself under the pew. I was afraid that I might look at the statue for too long and it would turn me into a statue. Then I would be the one crying because I would be stuck like that forever.

After prayers were offered to the statue, the congregation was allowed to go up to the statue and observe it close up. My mom wanted me to go up and see that statue, but there was no way I was leaving my safe haven.

"Lisa, stop being such a baby. You're a big girl now and all big girls go up to see the statue. Look at your cousin. She's up there and she's not afraid. Are you going to be a coward the rest of your life?" my mother said.

"Mommy, the statue scares me!" I pleaded.

It was no use. My mom pulled me out from underneath the pew and brought me up to the altar. I buried my head in her shoulder the whole time.

That night, I didn't sleep much. I kept seeing the statue in my mind. When I was asleep, I had dreams that I was stuck inside a statue or that the statue came to life and I was the reason she was crying. For weeks after that, I dreamed about the statue. My dad was angry with my mother for taking me and scaring me. Mostly, I think he was mad because I slept with them every night for the next month.

Years later, when I graduated from high school, my aunt gave me a tiny statue of Mary as a graduation present.

"Now Lisa, I'm giving you this statue, so Mary, our Holy Mother, can watch after you when your mother can't," she explained.

I took one look at the statue, and remembered that horrifying day in the church. That night I had nightmares that I was trapped as a statue and someone knocked me over. I awoke just before I hit the floor and shattered to pieces. I looked at the clock on my nightstand saw the statue staring at me. The way the moonlight reflected off her face, gave the illusion that she was crying. I jumped out of bed, grabbed the statue and stuffed it in a hallowed out book that I keep on my bookshelves. To this day, the statue remains in the book, and will NEVER take it out.

Rush Hour

Maura Giles

The scariest day as a teenager I recall is the one on which I took a driving test to get my license. I am in awe when I contemplate how I ever passed that test. It was the nineteenth of June, 1997, three months after I turned seventeen.

On the morning of that horrendous day, I stood in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles, nervous, frightened. I knew from my friends' descriptions and the long lines that I might be waiting a while, so I took a number and sat down. My fingers tapped uncontrollably on the sides of my chair, which had recently been occupied by a large burly man in a flannel shirt. I had no idea if my leaving with a license would become a reality. The thought of driving and false hopes had beleaguered me for months after I turned sixteen.

Have you ever wanted something so much, but it seemed as though you just were not going to get it, and you, anxious and afraid, waited with bouncing legs for your chance to try for it? I felt that way before I took my driving test, only I knew I had to pass. "License! Give me a license!" was the unspoken shriek from my grumbling stomach, and sure enough, I was called in that same hour to take the test.

The minute after they called my name, a DMV worker led me out to my car. I had parked it in the crowded parking lot right out front, which the DMV shared with the surrounding businesses. When I finally finished unlocking the doors, the instructor slowly slinked into the passenger seat. I took a deep breath, panned the parking lot one last time, and did the same.

After I had checked my mirrors and put on my seat belt, I was consumed with trepidation. Starting up the engine, I turned my head to check for on-coming cars and began to back out of the space. I could not see beyond the parked car next to me; I was backing out based on my own traffic assessment. My obstructed vision impaired me to the point I did not see a car circling the lot. I backed out almost ramming into the circling vehicle. I could see the fear on my instructor's eyes already, and we had not even left the lot.

I quickly restored my composure and pulled out of the parking

lot. I drove down the side street which my instructor had pointed out, slowly. When we had driven passed a car parked at the side of the road, he told me to circle the block and parallel-park behind the parked car. There was only one car, and so I needed only to pull up behind it. Suddenly I did not feel very well. I tried to park behind that single car three times. Imagine my embarrassment when the instructor began to tell me which ways to turn the steering wheel, first right, then left. After three tries, I had gotten fairly close to the curb- about one foot away. The instructor, sounding frustrated, said that was good enough, so I drove to the end of the block, back towards the DMV.

I turned the corner slowly, extremely slowly, then hit the gas. I figured I must have stepped on the accelerator a little too hard when I saw the instructor's head snap backward as if some one had just grabbed him by the hair. Seeing his reaction, I took my foot completely off the gas-pedal, slowing the car down to about ten miles per hour.

I put my foot back on the pedal and accelerated the car slowly, then rapidly: 20, 25, 30, 40, 50, oops, too fast, 40. About one block ahead of us there was a stop light. When we were one half of a block away from the light, it turned yellow. Naturally I stepped on the brake so the instructor would think I was a cautious driver. One nanosecond after I stepped on the brake I saw my instructor's head do that snapping thing again, only this time, forwards. I quickly decided that braking was not the correct decision in that situation and stepped on the gas to get through the light while it was still yellow. I am fairly sure I made it, but to this day I remember that the instructor was holding onto the passenger door so tightly and mumbling some sort of prayer.

I drove the car back into the DMV parking lot, and slowly, but gracefully pulled into my original parking space. I guess I did not realize there was a cement parking block in front of the space, but sure enough I found out when my instructor's head one last time snapped forward. "Just turn off the car," he said, his voice trembling.

I did not think that it went very well so I was a little skeptical about getting my license that day. "Maura Giles," a woman called. I swallowed my pride and my gum, and walked up to the woman, expecting the worst. "Stand over there," she said as I looked around and moved one step to the side. "No, in front of the backdrop," she corrected me.

"I got my license?" I asked in disbelief.

"Uh, yeah," she said, looking at me as if I was a moron. "Now look here," she held up her left hand, "and smile."

I did.

It would have been hard to find a happier teenager than I was as I drove home that afternoon after a long morning and for the first time welcomed the thought of rush hour.

Athena

Michael Nichols

Across fields of blowing
Doomed white, under blue,
Flaming skies, she takes me
Far from dreams of love,
From the curled grip of pride,
And my own bruised, drifting eyes.
She lifts my frostbit legs to hold me aloft
So we might watch together the drama of
Brittle mountains breaking and wave
Upon wave of heroes and Titans rising and falling.

Truly, you are Athena,
Goddess of the wise and brave.
You are Athena in the gray of your eyes,
The steel of your limbs,
The armor of your heart.
As the slipping sun succumbs to night
And sets this white world aglow in purples
And reds and pinks, your gray eyes
Dance with only the glint of cold thought.

Beautiful Athena, frozen like this winter,
If only I could melt your ice and iron,
Inspire your gray eyes to burst
With colors like this falling sun,
Or burn in the flame of my hasty whispers,
Then I might see the flicker of a smile
That could eclipse Aphrodite's all, transform
The seasons, and light my paradise.
But still you are untouchable,
A tower amid the swelling tides that have swept
Countless mortal souls to courage and cowardice.
Still my hands drift off your shield
Like the spiraling snow, to feel nothing but stone
From my wise, gracious, cold Athena.

Grasshopper Point

Jon Szabo

"How much further is it to the top?" We had not been climbing very long, but we seemed awfully high already, especially since we were only climbing the cliff to jump off of it.

"We're almost there, I think," Travis said. "This is the first time you've ever cliff dove, Quinn?"

"Yeah, I used to live in Chicago." I had moved to Arizona and met Travis earlier that year, in the summer before I began seventh grade.

"It's awesome! You'll love it because you're so crazy." We had gone mountain climbing a few weeks earlier, and Travis had accused me of taking unnecessary risks. He said I almost died quite a few times. I, however, was fairly confident about the chances I took.

We were at Grasshopper Point, in Sedona, Arizona. It was some sort of park where the Red Rock River crossed between the cliffs. On one side of river was a rocky beach where people used to set up picnics and swim all day long. Directly across the river were the cliffs. The divers had to swim across the river and climb directly out of the river onto the rocky wall. Travis and I had seen it done and we decided to try this time.

"As soon as I pull myself up to where my hands are, I'll be on top," Travis said. "Then, I can help you up." He had his left hand about six inches above his shoulder and his right one was holding on to the top of the cliff, about a foot and a half above his shoulders. He slid his left foot along the face of the rock and raised his body a few feet to another toehold. Then, he was able to swing a leg up and roll onto the surface of the top. I followed his exact path up from my position and he pulled me by the arm so I could make it the last couple of feet.

"We made it," I said. I looked out over the families below, on the other side of the river. Almost half of them were staring up at us. A little girl with blond curls and a pink bathing suit pointed at us yelled to her mommy. The boys who were only a couple of years younger than me sat and stared in awe. I was not much bigger than they were, but I had made the climb all the way to the top. I wondered if they had watched me climb the cliff, or if I had only caught their attention once I reached the top. I wanted the pretty teenage girls to look up and be

impressed.

"Do you want to jump first or should I?" Travis asked. I had forgotten about the jumping part of cliff jumping.

"Uh.... Let's sit up here for a while. It's so cool."

"Al right." He lay back against a boulder and looked out at the crowd of people. I sat and watched a small bug make its way over my foot. "Quinn, are you just gonna jump or are you gonna do a trick?" He sat up as he asked this.

"I dunno." I had assumed we were both just going to jump. The thought of tricks never even entered my mind. I could do a multitude of tricks off a diving board. I didn't see how this could be any different.

"I think I'm gonna dive," Travis said. "How 'bout you?"

"Maybe a twist flip?" I peered over the edge to see just how high up we were. I guessed it was about seventy feet. I had fallen out of a tree a few summers earlier and I was told I was thirty feet up. This looked like at least double that. "Yeah, a twist flip would work and it would make all those people cheer."

"Are you sure you can do it without getting hurt?"

"It's just water."

"No, from here, water can really hurt. Plus, you have to jump out far enough from the rock so that you don't hit the cliffs."

"I know." I was scared of the water hurting now. I remembered stories of how water is just like cement when you are really high up.

"Well, I'll go first so I can watch you go from the ground. Don't jump until I get to the other side." Travis made his way out to the edge of the cliff. "Do you think it's all the same...um...deepness?"

"I don't know. I guess so."

"Here goes." Travis shoved off the cliff with his feet and flew through the air. He looked so graceful, almost he was floating. I watched from above. The water looked much further away than what it was, and I was surprised when he made a splash. The whole crowd cheered. Travis swam across the river and waved up at me from our towels. My heart began to race. I could feel a lump in my throat as I swallowed. I clenched my fist and backed away from the edge. All of the people on the other side were looking at me now. Travis had gotten their attention, so now every eye on the beach was on me. I backed away until I was about ten feet from the edge.

"C'mon, Quinn! Jump!" Travis called.

"Yeah, Quinn! Go for it!" Other members of the crowd began to encourage me.

"You can do it!" yelled one of the pretty teenagers.

"Don't be afraid," called the little blond girl.

I slapped my leg and grabbed on to the legs of my bathing suit with all my might. I closed my eyes tight and tried to block out their voices. I told myself I could do this. I had climbed all this way. I couldn't go back down any other way. I took one last deep breath. I inhaled far enough that my skinny body looked grotesque. All of my ribs stuck out along with collarbones. I opened my eyes and started sprinting towards the edge. My last step was right on the corner of the edge. I got a great push off and my momentum carried me into the flip right away. I started twisting and realized I was still flipping. I was out of control. I started my movements too fast, and now I could not stop them. I was twirling in all different directions. I was pretty sure I had done four full flips and twisted all the way when my feet hit the water.

I stayed under for about ten seconds. I was thinking about what had just happened. I was all right. My out-of-control flips had landed me on my feet. I rose to the surface and saw the crowd. All of the people were just standing there, their mouths agape. The little blond girl had her hand over her eyes. A few of the teenagers had their heads in their hands. Travis had an incredible smile on his face.

"Holy shit!" he screamed. The crowd began to laugh hysterically. Travis and another boy came running into the water and took me by the arms. "Are you OK?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I think I over-rotated."

"Oh, you think so, Doctor?" He started to laugh again. The whole crowd was cracking up.

"I thought you were dead for sure," called an old man.

"That was incredible," said the boy who was helping me out of the water. "How'd you do it?"

"I dunno, just kinda jumped." I walked over to my towel and started to dry off. Most of the crowd was still staring at me or laughing about my jump as they talked with their families.

"You know what you did?" Travis asked.

"No, I think I flipped a couple of times and I'm pretty sure I was spinning."

(continued)

"I counted seven full flips from the top of the cliff to the water."

"Wow," I said.

"Yeah," continued Travis, "and like fifty spins."

"You were spinning so fast the whole time. Like this." The other boy made a twirling motion with his index finger. "I can't believe you're alive. You were like... Whoa, Ahh!" He spun around on his feet and wobbled around with his arms flailing about.

As we walked past the crowd of teenagers, on our way back to our bicycles, one of the prettiest said, "Hey, little kid, that was awesome." I smiled at her and kept on walking. Travis said I should have blown her a kiss. Instead, I punched him in the arm.

"It was really cool," said Travis. "Are you ready to go? Or do you want to jump again?" If I'd known I was going to move back to Chicago before I got another chance, I'd have climbed that cliff and jumped off until the sun went down. On that day, however, I said we should go home.

Years later, I returned to Grasshopper Point and the entire area was surrounded by barbed wire. There was a sign where the entrance used to be that read as follows:

Due to fatal accidents, Grasshopper Point is a restricted area. No trespassers allowed. Violators will be prosecuted and may face a prison sentence or be forced to pay up to five thousand dollar fine.

Arizona Parks Department

Prayer to Martha, Sister of Lazarus and Mary

John D. Groppe

Martha, busy, importuning Martha,
busying yourself about your brother's death,
you went up the Jerusalem road
to confront the Lord
and moved him to tears and to action.
Like your sister, we remain at home,
mute and unshaken
as your brothers and sisters and their children die.
Importune for them.
Be busy about our silent complicity.
Rouse us to anguish and anger and action.

Quiet Place

Matthew Eichas

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO A QUIET PLACE?
A PLACE WHERE ST. JOE COMES ALIVE
A PLACE WHERE FACES LOOK REAL A
AND CARD GAMES DID EXIST
A PLACE WHERE THE REFLECTING IS REALLY A POND
WHERE THE WATER TOWER ONCE READ ST. JOSEPH'S
COLLEGE
DWENGER IS BRAND NEW
AND
THE FIRES ARE SO HOT THAT YOU CAN FEEL THEM
WARM THE AIR
WHERE THE SMOKE STACK CAN BE SEEN IN THE DIS-
TANCE
WHERE HOGS PLAY IN THE MUD
AND
THE TRUE STORY OF FINANCIAL AID IS TOLD
FRIENDSHIPS WERE ALL NEW
AND
231 CROSSED 53
WHERE ALL THE DORMS DO STAND TALL, PLUS
LITTLE 5
AND
THE
X-MAS DANCE
WHERE THE GROTTO IS DARK
BUT SHADOWS STILL FALL
WHERE DREXEL WAS OPEN AND THE VIEW OF THE
STARS FROM THE
COURTYARD WAS GREAT!
WHERE'S YOUR QUIET PLACE?

Dreams in Indiana

Christopher Nelson

I walk these streets all alone
There is no direction leadin' to home
I watch you watch me as I pass by
The world watching me, wonder why?

In those streets, I see a reflection of myself in a store window
There I see, a small boy holdin' on to his ice cream cone
There is a shadow of a man
The boy's father stands next to him, but soon he will go
He leaves his boy all alone, alone in dreams in Indiana.

I close my eyes, pray inside to myself-
Wishin' to lose myself, Tryin' to hold on to myself
All my boyhood dreams, dreams in Indiana.

I wake up each mornin'
I splash a little cold water to my face
Lookin' in the mirror, not seein' me,
Not knowin' who I am or who I will be
Only holdin' on to what the world cannot take from me,
Dreams in Indiana.

Tonight I walk these streets, same streets,
as same thoughts runnin' through me
I have been prayin', night on night
I have loved, loved the thought of lovin' you
Dreamin' dreams, as we all do.
But, soon I will have to go,
To walk these streets,
To a world we made so cold.
I will hold on to myself,
Holdin' on to dreams in Indiana.

My Heart Stopped in Space

Megan Taylor

My heart hangs stopped in space
suspended by the silence
so thick and heavy as again your eyes
hold mine in that stare where I am
lost in questioning if I should
kiss you or just enjoy that moment
when all we see is each other
and all that exists around us
falls away
where for one ripping, tearing, euphoric moment
we are one with each other
willing prisoners inside searching orbs
and my muscles atrophy within me so that I cannot
reach for you
and then I realize that I am content to just
have you mine for those precious seconds
even if never again

Three, Two....One

Bree Ma'Ayteh

"Randy, do you have everything? Your father will be here in 15 minutes."

No response.

"Randy?" I left my spot at the kitchen table and walked into the room of my six-year-old son. I found him going through his toybox, still in his Curious George pajamas. I knelt beside him and placed my hand on his tiny shoulder. "Whatcha doin', honey?"

"I can't find my other shoe," he said frantically. "My black dress shoe. Daddy said to dress up today and I can't find it."

"Don't worry, it's around here somewhere," I said softly. Randy's face was red, and he looked like he was on the verge of tears. "What's the matter, honey? Did Daddy say something to you on the phone?"

"No."

"Then what is it? Can't you tell Mommy?"

"I don't want to go with Daddy today!" I sighed as my son buried his face in my shoulder.

Every Sunday, my ex-husband Jake came to pick up Randy for the day. And every Sunday, Randy held on to me for dear life, begging me to let him stay home.

It took all I had not to tell him that he could stay home.

"You only get to see your father on Sundays," I told him, in the same soothing tone I'd used only a week before. "Daddy misses you and wants to see you because he loves you *SO* much. You know that, right?"

"Uh-huh," he sobbed.

"Then what's the problem?"

"Today-today-" He had trouble speaking through his tears, and I allowed him to calm himself down before I asked my question again.

"Daddy wants me to go with him to *her* house, and I don't want to!"

"Ooh." When Randy said "she," he meant "Veronica," his daddy's girlfriend. I had only met her once. She came with Jake once to pick up Randy. She was one of those perky blondes with a large chest-the kind you'd expect to see bouncing around on the set of "Baywatch." She was also only 22 years old, which made her six years younger than me. Five

minutes after meeting her, I could see she didn't like me. After 10, I definitely knew that she didn't like my son. The two of us were two obstacles blocking her road to happiness with Jake.

"Why are you going over there?" I asked.

"We're gonna have dinner with her mom and dad, and she said they want to meet me."

Another "Oh" from me. I didn't know what to say, but I knew that the expression on my face was speaking volumes. However, my son was only six, and didn't have the maturity to pick up on my body language.

"She has a little brother who likes to pick on me," Randy continued, suddenly full of things to say. "He's in seventh grade and likes to pinch me when nobody's lookin'. He did that once when she brought him to Daddy's house. He says I'm puny for my age and that my voice sounds like a little girl's. And he says that Daddy's gonna marry her and that he'll be my uncle and then I'll have to do whatever he tells me to!" His face got red again, and his shoulders started to shake. "He's *mean* to me, Momma. I don't *want* him to be my uncle!"

He was going to marry her.

"Whoa, whoa, easy there," I said, swallowing hard. I wrapped my arms around him, and this time it was *me* that used *his* shoulder for comfort. I felt his little body pressed against mine, and took that moment to thank God for the only thing that hadn't been taken away from me when I signed my divorce papers. When I felt that the both of us were OK to talk, I pulled myself away and knelt down.

"Look at me for a minute and listen to what I have to tell you."

He wiped at his face with the back of his pajama sleeve and met my eyes.

"First of all, you will never have to listen to that little boy. Understand?" He nodded. "And if he's ever mean to you again, tell Daddy. If Daddy doesn't do anything about it, tell me and *I'll* talk to Veronica. Got it?"

"OK," he said, his breathing returning to normal.

"Good. Now, let's get you dressed. Daddy will be here any minute."

"But my shoe!"

"I'll find it. Mommies know just where to look," I replied, and I winked at him. He smiled his first smile of the day, and I breathed

another sigh, this time one of relief.

Jake was there to pick up Randy a few minutes later. Dressed in a pair of khaki pants, a blue sweater and the infamous black dress shoes (the missing shoe turned out to be under the kitchen sink), my little boy looked quite charming. Jake seemed pleased with his appearance.

"How grown up you look, Randy," he said, and Randy smiled as Jake kissed the top of his blond mop and gave him a hug. After they broke apart, he turned to me.

Jake and I had been divorced not even a year yet, and it was still hard for us to see each other. Well, "hard" might have been the wrong word. It was hard for me. For my ex-husband, it was more like an inconvenience.

"How are you, Mary Anne?" he asked softly.

"Fine. I heard you're having dinner with Veronica's parents tonight." I heard that you're getting married again, I added silently. What do you have to say about that?

"That's right. We figured that it was time that they met Randy." Jake sounded like he was going to add something else, but he said nothing.

"Well, he still has homework to do tonight, so—"

"He won't be gone too late. Just long enough to eat and to let her parents get to know him a little."

Long enough to size him up, I thought, and I gave Randy a hug. "OK, honey, have a good time," I said. He started to get that panicked look on his face again. Before Jake could notice it, I whispered in his ear, "If that boy says anything bad, tell me OK? I'll take care of it."

He nodded, and I handed him over to his father. "See you tonight," Jake called as they made their way to the car.

"See you tonight," I echoed.

I waved to Randy in the car until they were a red dot on the road. Watching the two of them drive off without me every Sunday were the worst moments of my life. It reminded me that we weren't a happy family of three anymore. On Sundays, I was a lonely woman of one.

I stood by the door for a long time.

Wedding Day

Chrissy Scafide

A faint repetitious church bell
is muffled amidst a roaring thunder
and shocks of lightning.

Wedding day.

The sky is as black
as the groom's tuxedo
and the wind as cold
as the disapproving father.

Rain drops fall
as hard as bullets
from all directions
and guests shield their heads
with black parasols
as though at a funeral.

Bride and groom make their first exit
out the church doors as husband and wife.
Down the stairs and through splashes of muddy puddles,
they are bombarded with piercing wind
and blowing leaves.

All of a sudden white doesn't seem so innocent.

The Stranger

Chrissy Scafide

"Dear, if your father hadn't gotten sick, I'm certain we would have gotten a divorce."

My stomach dropped. I took a deep breath and tried to get a hold of myself.

"Uh, what, Ma?" I asked.

"Oh yes, it's true. I didn't think we would be together long enough to celebrate our first anniversary. But he got sick. What can I say? I love your father. We're completely fine now."

She had a nonchalant smile on her face that annoyed me. I could tell she didn't think that any of this would bother me. That it would be no big deal to get news like this.

Tonight it was just my mother and I for dinner. Dad had to work late and both of my brothers were out. I tried to finish my dinner but I just couldn't. What she said just kept running through my head like a bad dream. Then I realized.... I really didn't know anything about my parents' relationship before my brothers and I were born. She never wanted to talk about it. She was great at changing the subject.

All she told me was that he got Crohn's Disease and had to be hospitalized about six months into their marriage.

"After that," she said, "he was very sick. He was sick all the time."

Dad would tell me little things, like how he was a boxer and boxed for Golden Gloves in Chicago. He also owned a '57 midnight blue Corvette. He loved it. He and the boys would drag race on the strip. He talked a lot about the boys.

I loved to hear his stories. He told me once that he challenged the fastest guys on the track team to a race. "I beat that nigger in my street shoes," he said. "I wasn't interested in running for the team, though. I just needed to beat the cops."

I didn't think much about what he said about the cops. Daddy would never break the law. He's the nicest sweetest guy in the world. He just threw stuff like that in his stories to make them sound adventurous. He was a great guy.

The pictures that he showed me of when he was young looked

like my older brother-same height, very Italian looking and with the same dark brown hair. The only difference was that Dad's hair was styled in a ducktail and he was much bigger. He had to be to win all those boxing matches. He told me he lost all his weight and got skinny after being in the hospital.

I guess my mom thought I was old enough to know the truth now. But why she chose just to blurt it out in the middle of a Tuesday night dinner, I had no clue. It shouldn't have any effect on me. I should just blow it off. They've been married happily for twenty-five years. Things have always been great, as far as I knew.

As far as I knew.

"Alright, Ma, explain," I said. "People don't just decide to get a divorce one day. You brought it up, now explain. What went wrong?"

"Well, everything. Your father was not a nice man. I mean, he was to me when we were dating but he wasn't too nice to anybody else. He was a typical Greaser. A Hoodlum. But I was in love..."

"Everyone does stupid things when they're young, right Ma?"

I was trying to defend him. I didn't want to believe what I was hearing. I didn't want my image of him to change.

"Yes, dear. But he took it too far. As soon as we were married, he was gone more and more. He was drag racing. And fighting. And drag racing. It was like he was married to his boys."

This news wasn't settling very well. I was learning that the man I looked up to and adored wasn't quite the "saint" that I made him out to be. At least not before I knew him.

"I couldn't take it anymore. He went to jail for a while, dear. You can never tell him that I told you, but he did. I won't tell you why. All you need to know was that I was a newlywed and I was alone."

"All right!" I screamed. "I don't want to hear anymore. These are things you should have kept to yourself!"

"I know, honey, I know," she said. "But I didn't want you to hear it from anybody else. I thought it was time."

I tried to calm down. I knew Dad would be home soon and I didn't want him to see me upset. I didn't want him to know that I knew.

"Will you just tell me what happened when he got sick? I just want to know what kept your marriage together. I realize I'm part of your happy ending, but I want to know how it got to this point."

"Well, it's simple, really. I got a phone call from one of his

(continued)

cronies saying they had to rush Dad to the hospital. At first I wasn't going to go. He hadn't been home for days and I was pissed. I really was. I thought he had got into another fight."

"What was it?"

"His disease was getting worse. He was diagnosed at age eighteen but he never took care of himself the way he should have. He let it get too bad. His friend told me he was having severe pains in his stomach. Then I knew."

"Did you end up going?"

"Yes, and that is exactly what saved our marriage. When I got there, no one was there. None of his boys stuck around. I was there every day for two months. I'm not quite sure why I did it. I just did. The boys would call every once and a while, but we never really heard from them again."

"And when he was well enough to go come home, did he go out much?"

"No dear. I believe he went through some sort of internal change when he was in that hospital.... At least it's what keeps me sane. I think everything just came together for him. He realized that he needed to be with me. It's been fine ever since, so we don't talk about it much. We love each other, dear. Sometimes it takes something like that to realize it."

Just then I heard the back door. Dad came in and hung his hat and coat on the hook in the hallway.

"How's my girls?" he asked.

Ma and I glanced at each other and then back at him. It was too late. He already seemed like a different man. A stranger.

We both answered, "Great."

Dwenger

Lisa Phillips

He sits quietly between old and new,
A stone savage watching his time pass.
The bells in the chapel chime the hour
But his halls are screaming with silence.

With no one to listen to the stories he would tell,
He awaits his fate
Like an old, ailing, man in a nursing home
With an empty seat on the other side of the checkers' table.

The Significance of Coffee Grounds

Bree Ma'Ayteh

"Where were you last night? I was surprised to find you gone when I came home from work. I wanted to tell you about my day."

Nicole looked up from the bowl of cereal she wasn't eating when her mother walked into the kitchen, but wasn't quite able to meet her eyes. "I had a date last night. With Adam."

"That's right. Adam. The boy I met last week, right? The one who took you to that fancy restaurant downtown?"

"That's the one."

"He's a nice boy, Nicole. He was so polite!... Can you pour me a cup of coffee, honey? I'm running late. Hit the damn snooze button three times this morning!"

"I have to make a pot first," the young girl replied, getting up from her place at the table.

"Thanks, honey, you're a doll.... When I heard where the two of you were going, I nearly fell out of my chair! Her certainly has money to spend if he's taking you to a place like *that*, doesn't he? I never dated a wealthy boy when I was your age-they didn't go out with girls who weren't as rich as they were, and if they did, it was because they thought they could get a piece of her. But Adam's different, I can see that already."

"He does have a lot of money."

"So.... Tell me all about last night! Where did you go? What did you do? I wish I had remembered that the two of you had another date, I would've stayed awake until you got home so I could get the details. But I was so tired from work, it was all I could do not to fall asleep on the way home! The last time I nodded off on the subway, some homeless woman tried taking the shoes off my feet! I learned my lesson that night, *that's* for sure. Did you guys have a good time?"

Nicole froze at the sudden change in her mother's speech, and she dropped the coffee container on the floor. Chocolate brown coffee grains scattered themselves all over the white-tiled floor.

"Look at you, Miss Clumsy! Forget the caffeine rush, I'll just grab some juice."

"I'm sorry, Mom. I'll clean it up."

"Accidents happen, I'm not worried about it. Just clean it up real

good, or the grains will be sticking to my socks when I come home tonight and walk in here." The older woman grabbed a juice box from the refrigerator. She sipped the juice with one hand and began to put on her shoes with the other. "You never answered my question. Was it a good time?"

"... Yes."

"And...?"

Nicole was silent. "And that was it," she said softly, and took a moment's pause before she continued to sweep up the coffee grounds.

"Private stuff, huh?" her mother replied knowingly. "That's OK. Can you at least tell me if you plan on *seeing* Richie Rich again?" By this time, the juice box was in the garbage can, and two white tennis shoes were secured to her feet. She proceeded to put on her jacket.

"I-I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know? He's such a nice boy, honey, such a nice boy. When you meet a boy like Adam, you don't let him get away. What's wrong with him? Never mind that, nothing's wrong with him. What's wrong with *you*?"

"I don't know if I like him enough, that's all." Nicole's voice had become a whisper.

"Well, that's a silly reason, you've only been out with him a few times. It took three dates with your father for me to figure out that I was even attracted to him. Granted, we divorced before we were married five years, but that's not the point." Glancing at her watch, Nicole's mother ran her fingers through her hair. "I'd better get going or I'll miss my train. I'll be home late again tonight. The mall wants maintenance to stay an hour after closing today. J.C. Penney's is having some "blowout sale", and they expect it to be a zoo."

"OK.... Mom?"

She had just opened the door when she turned to face her daughter. "What *is* it, Nicole Catherine? I'm going to be late."

Nicole heard the impatience in her mother's voice and, after a moment, shook her head. "It's not a big deal."

"We'll talk more tonight, OK?" She softened her tone and impulsively stuck out her tongue as a form of farewell. Nicole smiled back in reply.

"See you later, then!"

Nicole stood at the window until she saw her mother cross the

street. The lump that had been forming in her throat throughout the morning finally turned into heavy sobbing. "It is a big deal," she whispered brokenly. "It is."

And then her mind started to wander....

The date had started out OK. Adam had chosen to see a movie in one of the nicer theaters in town. Nicole couldn't quite remember the title; "American Beauty" or something like that. It didn't matter; she missed most of it. Adam couldn't seem to keep his hands off of her.

"Hey, I thought we came to see a movie," she said in what she hoped was a light-hearted tone. Adam was in the midst of massaging her knee, slowly bringing his hand up closer to her thigh.

"You just look so pretty tonight," he replied. "I can't help myself."

Nicole smiled weakly and didn't say anything else.

"Do you need to be home at a certain time?" he asked. A woman sitting in the row in front of them turned around and glared at the young couple. Nicole shook her head in reply. Adam brought his face close to her ear, his voice barely above a whisper. "Good. Then we'll go back to my house for a while. My parents are dying to meet the girl I talk about so much."

"Really? I mean.... You talk about me to your parents?" she asked, and this time her smile was genuine.

"Sure I do. I'm crazy about you, Nicole." She was about to respond when the woman in the front row turned around again. "I happen to be crazy about this movie, so if you would shut up for a minute—"

"Let's get out of here," Adam said, cutting her off. He stood up and, grabbing Nicole's hand, the two quickly made their way out of the theater.

The movie theater wasn't far from Adam's house. When they got out of the car, he took Nicole by the hand and led her inside.

It was dark when they went inside. "Hello?" Adam called as they wandered from room to room. "Mom? Dad? Anybody here?"

No reply. "I didn't see any cars in the driveway," Nicole said.

"I don't understand, they said they would be-Damn!" He suddenly cried out and smacked himself in the forehead. "They're at the opera tonight-I completely forgot!"

"I can meet them another time," she said to reassure him.

"I know, but I told you they would be here..."

"It's really OK."

"Well, we just got here, and it would be a waste of time just to turn around and head back..." He turned to face her, and pulled her close. "Did I ever tell you how pretty you are?"

"You might've said something along those lines," she replied, but before she could say anything else, he lowered his head and kissed her.

It was a long kiss, and a good one. Nicole's mind was spinning as he led her to what turned out to be his bedroom. Without turning on the lights, he wrapped his arms around her and they started kissing again. His hands went through her hair, and then up and down her back. Before she knew what was going on, he was guiding her down to the bed.

The light bulb went on inside her head, and Nicole broke away. The two lay on the bed, breathing heavily. "What's the problem?" he said huskily. "I thought we were getting along."

"We were-we are... But I'm not like that."

"What do you mean? You've been flirting with me all night. How can you say you don't want it now?" He moved closer to her.

Nicole was scared now, and could only manage to speak short sentences. "I-I never said... I wanted anything."

Adam sensed her fear, and changed his tone of voice. "Nicole... I've never felt this way about anybody before. I like you a lot. I just want to show you how much." He reached out and caressed her cheek, moving still closer until their bodies were touching again. "Have you ever done this before?"

"No," she whispered, and he laughed softly. "Is that why you're so nervous! I don't care if you're experienced, Nicole. I'm glad you're not the kind of girl that makes it with every guy she goes out with." He kissed her softly on the mouth and continued where he left off.

"Adam, please..."

"Sshh. Just relax and have a good time," he interrupted, and she for the rest of the time she was silent. Adam went ahead with what he had planned to do, not even noticing that Nicole was crying the whole

time.

The barking of the neighbor's dog brought Nicole back to reality. "Good time my ass. It *was* a big deal," she repeated to herself as she wiped her eyes. Her gaze went to the window once more. Nicole needed somebody to talk to, somebody to tell her that what happened last night shouldn't have happened. But it needed to be somebody who wasn't so worried about spilled coffee grounds.

Gum

Mary Fortman

I remember the first and only time I did something illegal. I was four and on Fridays my father took me up to Shipsewanna, a large Amish community, to go to the horse auctions. Always on the way back we stopped into this little grocery store that was only open in the summers. The roof, I remember clearly, was green, fiberglass, corrugated sheeting, that gave everything a green tint when you're inside-like looking through green sunglasses. There were only about four aisles in the place, but each of them went all the way to the ceiling. So on Fridays, my father would buy non-perishable things that were cheaper there than in big grocery stores. He was down one of the first aisles, and I was standing in front of the candy rack by the register.

I wanted gum so badly, but we were never allowed gum so I knew my father would not buy it. Then an idea came into my head: *I'll just take it*, but the woman was still at the register. That's when it happened; my father wanted something from a high shelf, and he asked the woman for a ladder. There I stood alone in front of the gum, and no one was watching. I acted fast, taking the stick of gum with my grubby little hand. I pilfered it. Hidden in the deepest recess of my pocket, there was no way anyone would discover my crime. Scared to the core, I had to wait another ten minutes before my father was ready to leave. Finally outside, I was ecstatic with my triumph. I was a criminal genius.

My genius would not last for long. Like a typical four-year-old, I was not a patient child. Why I thought I could get away with it, I don't know, but I opened the gum and had a piece. It was so good and sugary that I began to chomp, the tell-tale sign of gum. Not ten minutes from the store my father pulled the car off to the side of the road and turned around in his seat. "Where did you get gum?"

"From the store," I replied. "The lady gave it to me."

"She didn't say anything about it to me," he said. He looked at me intently, studying my face. It was that which gave me away. "Don't lie to me, young lady. Did you steal that gum?"

I said nothing, too afraid to move or speak, or even chew. Stealing, I thought to myself. Is that what I did? It was and I was caught.

The next thing I remember was my father holding me up in

(continued)

front of the lady behind the register. It was in this terrible moment, admitting my crime, that I truly understood wrong. Before this, wrong had been hitting brother, something I was never sorry for doing. From then on wrong was shame. "I'm sorry," I said, holding out to her the pack of gum. "I won't ever do that again."

Canal Walk

Chrissy Scafide

We float innocently along,
fueled by the spark of each other's thoughts.
Arm in arm we stroll through
the peaceful downtown streets.

As we approach the canal, we
swiftly descend down the cement
stairs and willingly, I take your hand
to follow your lead to the waters edge.

The whisper of an unusually
calm November wind gently
meets the sparkling surface
to wake it from its serene stillness.

At dusk, we pause and together
gaze with bleary eyes into the azure sky,
as we wait for drifting clouds to unmask the radiant moon.

In the powerful glow, we silently imagine
our own version of the American Dream,
and with arms light as Spring air,
next to the sparkling city canal,
pull each other close.

Sunken Sunday

Maura Giles

"I'm going out with Jamie, Corey, Jackie, and Ted tonight."

"Have fun," I smile. 'I hope you get hit by a bus,' I think to myself. Although I lay in bed and watch TV, I can't help but think about all of the homework I have to do. I stare at my roommate who is going out to drink with her friends tonight. Doesn't she have class tomorrow? I'll ask her. "Don't you have class tomorrow?"

"Not until 11:00." She curls her hair, and I curl my toes. I hate her for being a math major. She has no idea how good she has it. She never has to write research papers on Faulkner or Conrad, or read thousand-page novels. I can't believe how much homework I have to do!

The weekend flew by. And now, like every Sunday, I lay in bed with my bag of potato chips, thinking about all of the work I have to do and dreaming about how nice it would be if classes were cancelled on Monday, and I could put my work off for another day. I can't believe she's been curling her hair for twenty minutes.

I take the remote and flip through the 48 channels. Just my luck, Bill Clinton is on 12 out of the 48 channels, and nothing is on the other 36 except some special about two men that are joined at the hip. I wonder how they live like that. I turn off the TV and close my eyes. I hate Sundays. It's not even sunny.

"When's your first class?" my roommate asks, knowing full well that it's at 8:00am.

I open my eyes and watch her hairspray her hair, "8:00am." I catch a glimpse of my bookshelf. It's filled with novels that have brand new spines. I groan. But, they do look nice sitting on my shelf.

"Oh 'T,' by the way, Phil is staying here tonight."

Thanks for giving me so much notice, bitch, I think to myself. "But I have a lot of work to do," I tell her. "Can't you ever stay at Phil's?"

She stops putting her lipstick on. "Tara, maybe you should stop doing your homework the day before it's due." I hate her even more now. I hate Sundays even more now. I hate Phil even more now. "We'll be back. Don't wait up." She smiles at me. I think I saw fangs. She's gone, thank God.

I roll over onto my other side, and onto my bag of potato chips. Damn it! I turn the TV back on and watch the rest of the special on the two men joined at the hip.

Bread and Circuses

Michael Nichols

If I played the part of the buzzing gadfly
And declared our Rome was falling,
Transforming into a pitiful creature, craven and appalling,
That the jewels of our little civilization had lost their glisten,
Would the Emperor or his Princes, or anyone at all, even listen?
Would they contemplate or consider or even hear a word I said?
Or would they merely offer me an additional serving of circuses and bread?

The harshness and grandeur of the desert
Has surrendered to the weight of a gleaming, pleasant mirage,
The crux of the cake has vanished under slick frosting and facades.
Humility has long been forgotten in exchange for exaltation,
Which is the Emperor's power to bestow, as well as humiliation.
Only the nimblest of lines remains between the living, the dead,
And those who have decided to indulge themselves in circuses and bread.

And if I did play the part of that gadfly,
It is unsettling obvious the leprous fate that would descend
As old friends morphed into strangers in a huff of cold. But still to the end,
Despite the whirl of frozen shoulders and selective blindness of eyes,
I will murmur and buzz to never recognize
The wonderful, pretty little lies which we are fed
Through mouths and eyes already gruesomely stuffed with circuses and bread.

The Visit

Sara Post

I could tell the minute I got in the door and dropped my bag, I wasn't staying. My father was there, in my mother's house, in her living room no less. His feet were propped up on the coffee table, the TV was on and I could hear an announcer's voice over the roar of fans.

"What a cheap call!" My father dismissed the TV to take a sip of his beer. His beer was never very far away.

"Well hey Sport!"

"Hey Dad. What are you doing here?"

"What, I have to have an excuse to wish my favorite child Happy Birthday?"

"Well, thanks," I said coldly. "It was last week." The remark cut him, his eyes dropped to the floor and he sat up straight on the couch. I had been at practice and I was tired, I just wanted to take a shower and didn't have the energy to care to be other than up front with him. But he deserved it. He couldn't just show up wishing me a happy birthday when he hadn't even been around, or even remembered one in the last four years. I was past wanting a "Happy Birthday" from him.

"Funny thing," he said as he held his beer up to the light appreciatively, "your mother couldn't stand to have alcohol in the house when I was around. I just went in the kitchen, there's a six pack in the fridge."

"Yeah," I said as I bent over to untie my tennis shoes, "she usually keeps a few around for Glenn. Is she upstairs getting ready to go out now?"

"I don't know where she is." Silence. "Glenn who?" he asked, trying not to sound too inquisitive.

"Her boyfriend," I answered, not looking up at him. I sat on the floor in silence for a moment before I headed upstairs, taking the steps two at a time.

My mother was getting ready to go out; I could smell her perfume wafting from the bathroom. She was humming. She always hummed when she was getting ready to go out with Glenn. She was beautiful from life, from having loved and been loved, and from conquering with a faithful heart all that had ever gone astray.

"Oh, hello darling!" she said as she smiled at me in the mirror.

Her back was to me, but our eyes met in the reflection. "How was practice?"

"Alright. I'm tired, though. I'm glad it's Friday."

"Did you see your father downstairs?"

"How could I miss him? He told me 'Happy Birthday', Mom. He was just sitting there, right in the living room, all comfortable. Like.... Well, like he has a right to be here."

"He called and asked me if he could come. He said he had something for you. Didn't he tell you?" she asked, as she turned and looked at me.

"No, he didn't tell me anything. He was just drinking his beer." I was silent for a moment. "He told me 'Happy Birthday', Mom."

I could smell her hair when she hugged me. I had smelled her hair a thousand times, warm, spicy, comforting. I balled my hands up as I wrapped arms around her, but I could not hide an angry sob.

I started downstairs and sat on a step about halfway down the staircase, looking over into the living room through the banisters. The TV was still on, the game underway. My father was stretched across the couch; he didn't even take his shoes off.

"Well Sport, are you ready?"

"Ready for what?"

"Didn't your mom tell you? We're going out for your birthday!" He sat up, a smile across his face. In all of the years he had completely forgotten my birthday I had always wished he would remember just once. "When you were little, remember how you wanted to be an ice skater? Oh, how you wanted to ice skate! Everything had to be ice skates this, or ice skates that. So one year for your birthday, I got us tickets to the Ice Capades. You probably don't remember that, do you? Well I got sick-"

"Yes, I do remember," I cut him off. I remembered exactly what happened. Not everyone was surprised to find out why my parents got a divorce. "I was six and you never showed up after work until the next morning, so Uncle Rob took me to the Ice Capades because Mom called him crying."

My father grew silent, the smile faded from his face. He looked down at his hands, studied them, and drew a deep breath. He tried to smile again.

"Well anyway, I thought it would be nice for old times' sake to

go to the Ice Capades together. What do you say?"

I wanted to tell him that there were no "old times" between us, and that I hated ice skating now. I had hated it for years. And I wanted to tell him how I spent every single birthday he had missed, and how I didn't care anymore. And I wanted to know how he had spent every weekend while I sat on the front step, packed for a weekend at his house. I wanted to tell him I liked my mother's boyfriend and I hoped they would get married, and I wanted to tell him that we did fine together, her and I. And I wanted to ask him if he could remember every drink he had taken, and if it was good because I sure hoped it was worth it. And I wanted to tell him he was too late.

"You know, Dad, I don't think I'm really up to it right now. I'm awfully tired, and I have a swim meet tomorrow." He was silent; he reached for his beer. It was empty, and he sat it back down on the coffee table.

He stood up. "Well, I'll leave the tickets here in case you change your mind. Maybe one of your friends would want to go or something." I nodded my head, and watched him as he pulled his coat on. He opened the door.

"Dad, wait." I stood up, but I didn't know what to say. I certainly didn't want to stop him from leaving. But didn't want him to not come back, either. I walked down a few steps. "My swim meet starts at ten tomorrow-maybe you could come?" He nodded his head, his eyes not meeting mine and pulled the door closed behind him.

All My Sorrow and I Alone

Christopher Nelson

Never thought I would feel pain like this-
Never thought I would hate your kiss.
Never thought we would be-
Another forgotten dream.
Never thought I would hear you lie,
Now my heart is dead-
Laid out to die.
Why did you hurt me so?
Leavin' all my sorrow and I alone.

When I would close my eyes, I would see-
Me in your arms, You holdin' on to me.
Never thought you would make me cry-
Never thought I would need to know why.
Why did you choose the empty road,
Placin' my love out in the cold.
Why did you hurt me so?
Leavin' all my sorrow and I alone.

I would of loved you 'till the end of time-
You could have always been mine.
But you had to lie and deceive-
And how I believed.
You'll never know how much I hurt;
My heart and soul is dead,
Please, bury my emptiness underneath the Earth.
Why did you hurt me so?
Leavin' all my sorrow and I alone.

When I think of all the words we have said,
Our words of love, words, which are now dead.
I cannot help, but feel all the pain I feel-
Wishin' all the horrible truth was not real.
Everything, which was real, died.
Why did you hurt me so?
Leavin' all my sorrow and I alone.

Touching Souls

Lisa Phillips

My soul lingers in yours,
A whispering, muttering mass
An elegant mastery of dancing grace
Flung fully into fortune
Once scared, once alone
Now quietly being, gently reveling.

Is there anything closer to perfection
Than sitting as we are,
One foot apart, a rose between us,
But within each other completely
Like a rainbow and the sky?

A Lady of Tremendous Character

Chrissy Scafide

As a timid and shy little seven year old girl, Samantha, named after her great Aunt, a dancer and a lady of tremendous character, makes a habit of venturing out alone into the remarkably vast courtyard in the center of her fathers' monstrous estate, wearing her delicate purple and yellow flowered print sun dress, a birthday gift from Daddy, and white sandals with the buckles always undone, to playfully chase curious butterflies that happen to flutter by until they slowly make their way out of the courtyard, and only then to discover the sheer joy of twirling endlessly about with the hope of someday becoming as graceful as her great aunt, and watching her dress elegantly sway along with the gentle spring breeze and her long shadow, cast on the lawn by the promising sun, dancing along with her, until feeling silly and dizzy and the chaos sends her tumbling clumsily down to the ground, where she remains on her back, filled with laughter and joy until her sparkling green eyes, bright as the lawn after a spring shower, begin to uncross and focus on her favorite weeping willow across the lawn and she braces herself well enough to skip over to it and allows herself to fall to the ground once more, under the cool, inviting shade of its canopy, this time with the sincere intentions of gazing up at the hypnotic movement of the branches and gradually drifting off into an exotic slumber filled with innocent dreams of proud, white horses pulling an enchanted carriage occupying two young lovers--a handsome, well-to-do lad and a beautiful young dancer of tremendous character.

Stuffing and Nonsense

Maura Giles

ACT I

SETTING: *The action takes place mainly around a table or counter in CLAIRE's kitchen. There are pot bowls, and food all around HER. There is a microwave somewhere behind HER. There is a swinging door that leads to the rest of the house.*

AT RISE: *At the counter/table, CLAIRE is preparing dinner (mashed potatoes at the moment). HER parents and HER in-laws are in the other room(s).*

(Enters HELEN.)

HELEN: Claire! Have you made the potatoes yet?

CLAIRE: Don't worry mother. I have it all under control.

HELEN: *(sighs)* Oh Claire. Look at those lumps. Didn't I teach you anything about mashing potatoes? You do it like this.

(HELEN begins mashing potatoes)

CLAIRE: Mother. I can do it. Just go sit down and relax.

(CLAIRE lightly pushes HELEN out of the kitchen, then begins mashing the potatoes noticeably harder and muttering to herself)

ROXY *(enters shortly after HELEN leaves)* Claire do you need any help in here?

CLAIRE: No, I'm doing just fine on my own thank you.

ROXY: Are those hand-mashed potatoes?

CLAIRE: Yes, Roxy, they are.

ROXY: You shouldn't have gone to all that trouble. *Hogan's* make instant potatoes you know. Just 8 minutes in the micro.

CLAIRE: Yes, I know. I just thought I would try to make this Thanksgiving a little special, since this year Tom and I decided to have both families together.

ROXY: All right. But if you need any help, just yell.

(ROXY goes to exit through the swinging door, bumping into HELEN, who is entering the kitchen.)

ROXY: *(as SHE exits)* Oh, excuse me.

HELEN: *(as SHE enters)* No, excuse me. *(to CLAIRE after ROXY leaves)* Well, she's quite a piece of work.

(continued)

CLAIRE: Mother, please. You said you wouldn't start that. Not today, you promised.

HELEN: I'm sorry dear, but I just can't understand anyone who thinks that home cooking consists of frozen pizza and macaroni and cheese.

CLAIRE: Mother, she's a busy woman, ever since her husband died. She can't be a housewife anymore. All she has is her job at-

HELEN: And her escorts. Which are way too young for someone her age.

CLAIRE: Mother, leave her alone. (*SHE sprinkles brown sugar into a bowl of baked beans*)

HELEN: Claire! What on Earth?! You're putting in way too much brown sugar! (*Grabs the brown sugar from CLAIRE*)

CLAIRE: Mother, I know what I'm-

HELEN: And look at those rolls! You're supposed to glaze the tops with butter, before you bake them. (*HELEN picks up the glazing brush and the butter container*) What?! Margarine?! Claire! I can't believe you.

CLAIRE: Please! It's my dinner. Let me do it my way.

HELEN: I am. I just think you can use a little suggestion.

CLAIRE: Well, you've been "suggesting" my entire life. You know, I finally get married, move away, and start a new life. But it's not a new life, is it mother? I used to try and make you happy, but now it's my turn. Don't you see? I thought I could do something to please you and me. I thought it would be this dinner. Well, I've had it!

HELEN: Claire, settle down. You don't know what you're saying. Look, you're so busy ranting, you forgot about the stuffing.

CLAIRE: Stuffing?! Stuff the stuffing! This is exactly what I 'm talking about! You don't even care about how I feel! You're too worried about the stuffing drying out, or the lumps in the gravy! And on top of it all, you insult my mother-in-law, and my husband!

HELEN: That's not fair. I never said anything bad about Tom.

CLAIRE: Well, the day's not over! Why can't you just get along with Roxy? She's a very nice woman.

(*Enters ROXY.*)

ROXY: I just wanted to see how things were going-oooh, are those baked beans? Are they *Brum's Baked Beans*? They make the best. Come right in the can. Just heat 'em and eat 'em! Mmm! Those rolls smell delicious! Are they *Goonberg's*? I just love the way they are so flaky ...mmm ... and the hint of butter on top.

HELEN: I told you so.

CLAIRE: You know what?! Why don't I leave you two with *Hogan, Goonberg*, and whoever else you two have invited, and you can make the dinner!

(CLAIRE EXITS. HELEN and ROXY stare at each other in awe)

ROXY: I guess I've come in at a bad time.

HELEN: Don't worry. She gets like that on occasion.

ROXY: Well I guess that's to be expected when making a big homemade meal like this. I would've probably just had it catered.

HELEN: Catered? Are you serious? On Thanksgiving? That's absurd.

ROXY: Not really. When I was younger, my parents both worked, so no one had time to be at home all day and slave over the hot stove.

HELEN: Wow! When I was younger, my mom would go in the kitchen at dawn to begin cooking everything from scratch, and not come out until dinner was ready and it was time to eat.

ROXY: Now that I work all the time, and have no one to cook for at home, most of my meals are delivered or drive-through.

HELEN: I can't imagine. You have to eat at home sometimes.

ROXY: Oh, I do. But they are mostly microwave recipes. The microwave is not as bad as some people think. As a matter of fact, I made a green bean dish just the other day, it was delicious. And it only took a few minutes.

HELEN: Really? I don't know if I would trust that.

ROXY: It's so easy. As a matter of fact, Claire's got all the ingredients we need right here. I can zip one up in no time.

HELEN: If you think it's that good, there's no harm in trying. After all, it looks like dinner is up to us now.

ROXY: (as SHE begins making the dish) You won't be disappointed. You may never look at your microwave the same again.

(ROXY puts the dish in the microwave)

HELEN: Roxy, what do you think about this gravy? Do you like it lumpy?

ROXY: It makes no difference to me. You're the real chef.

HELEN (reminiscing): You know, I remember when I was Claire's age. I was married only a few months, and every meal I made was a disaster. There was this one time when I tried to make a layered cake. I had just finished frosting it, when the top layer slid right off and onto the floor.

ROXY: I tried cooking for my husband and I when we first got married.

It was horrible. I even burned the toast at breakfast.

HELEN (*laughing*): The first time I tried making fettuccini Alfredo, I overcooked the noodles and made the sauce too thick. My husband said it was like eating paper in paste.

ROXY (*laughing*): Once I made biscuits. Well, I guess I forgot I had made them, and didn't remember until the smoke alarm started going off.

HELEN: You're kidding!

ROXY: Would I joke about something like that? You've got to give Claire some credit. This is a pretty heavy task. Making dinner for two different families is not the best way to break yourself into the habit of cooking. I think she's doing okay so far. I mean, she hasn't burned anything yet. (*SHE smiles*)

HELEN: Or dropped anything on the floor. (*returning the smile*)
(*Microwave beeps*)

ROXY: That must be my green beans! (*takes dish out of oven*)

HELEN: Wow! Those smell delicious!

ROXY: Here try a bite. (*gives HELEN a fork*)

HELEN: Mmm! That's really good!

(*Enters CLAIRE.*)

CLAIRE: Okay! I've decided that you two need to let me make this dinner on my own. If you want to help that's fine. But you have to do it my way. Also, I don't want to hear any homemade or quick tips from either of you. And you two better start getting along. I will not have two people I care about talking behind each other's backs in my house. I think that's all. So if you can't handle these conditions, then please leave my kitchen.

(*ROXY and HELEN look at each other and laugh*)

CLAIRE: I don't think this is very funny.

HELEN: Claire, honey, did I ever tell you about the first time I made a layered cake?

END OF PLAY

In the Distance

Michelle Oberting

In the distance
I hear my name
and remember
all the shame
and pain.
I quickly come to,
but what is that in the distance?
A hand, for who?

Summer Night Waltz

Chrissy Scafide

A warm gentle breeze emerges from her bedroom window
as she lies awake in bed.

An orchestra of fans whirl the air in a gentle rhythmic motion
through the stillness of the house.

She immediately finds herself in the middle of the room,
spinning and twirling in her best nightgown.

My Turn at the Deathbed

Lisa Phillips

I stand, watching her sleep;
Her heavy chest laboring to move
In its shallow pattern.
The rasping, decay-filled snores
Echo in my tormented mind.
Would it be better if she were dead?

Happy Feet

Bree Ma'Ayteh

I was a late bloomer. By the time I reached 13, I still had yet to receive my first kiss, be asked out on my first date, or even be approached by a boy that I liked. The current object of my affection, Ken Hiatt, had paid some attention to me at the beginning of the school year, but having no experience with members of the opposite sex, I hadn't known how to respond to him. The result? After finding out that he was flirting with someone who could barely muster up the courage to talk to him, Ken took his romantic feelings elsewhere. Meanwhile, I hated myself for being so hard to approach, for freezing like a statue whenever he was in the same zip code that I was.

However, we did get to share one happy moment together and, for as long as I live, I will never forget it. The day was June 22, 1994, the day my class had its graduation luncheon. Even now, almost six years later, the memory brings a smile to my face.

The luncheon was an important event for eighth graders; it gave them a chance to dress up and flirt with the administration's blessing. I myself did not have that exact agenda in mind, but I did try to look my best with the hopes of catching Ken's attention. I remember wearing my golden silk shirt and black skirt (the skirt courtesy of my Aunt Donna, who told me to "go for it!") and praying to God at least give us an opportunity to talk to each other. I was nervous the whole morning, until we boarded the school bus that would take us to the hall at which the luncheon was taking place; then I was terrified. Terrified of never having the chance to talk to him and, at the same time, being given the chance and finding a way to ruin it. I felt as if I was in an emotional tug-of-war, with my fear on one side and my hope on the other.

Once in the hall and seated at my table, I finally allowed myself to glance over in Ken's direction. I remember thinking, "God, he looks cute." And he did, fitting nicely into his navy blue suit with a tie to match. He was one of the "dressier" guys there, and I felt a certain amount of pride in looking at him, pretending that he fancied himself up just for me.

We were forced to stay seated until the lunch was served, but after my classmates and I had had our fill, the mingling began. While the

boyfriends and girlfriends found their way to the dance floor, I found my way to a bench on the sidelines. In addition to being shy, I was a complete klutz; dancing was definitely not in my area of expertise. So I talked to some friends, all the while sneaking glances in Ken's direction. He was on the other side of the dance floor, his feet as inactive as mine.

The fast music was dominant for almost an hour, and then it shifted into the first slow song. More couples migrated to the dance floor, and I was left feeling more foolish than ever. My friend Maricela came over to me, looking for Lea, who was in turn being looked for by Carl, who wanted to dance with her—a typical teenage dilemma. Always on the side of true love, I found myself becoming a member of the search party. While on Lea's trail, I bumped into Katrina, my best friend. "Come with me," she urged, and grabbed my arm. My hands felt clammy and my blood ran cold inside—I instinctively knew what was going to happen. On the other side, some boys had crowded around Ken. I could hear him protesting, "But I don't know how! I don't know how!"

Don't worry, Ken, I thought. Neither do I.

I do not know how Katrina managed to get me on the dance floor; I was pulling away earnestly in hopes of making a run for it. I am also puzzled as to how the boys were able to bring Ken to my spot. However, I *do* remember looking into Ken's eyes; they were full of fear, and I was scared by the thought that he really did not want to dance with me. Before Katrina had the chance to object, I fled the scene. Once alone, I allowed myself to cry.

My best friend found where I was and tried to convince me I was crazy. "Of course he wants to dance with you; why wouldn't he?" she asked. "He's probably just as scared as you are."

I just shook my head and sobbed some more as she put her arm around my shoulders. After a few minutes, she rose from her place, telling me she would be back in a minute. Grateful for the time alone, I took the opportunity to take a deep breath and wipe the tears from my eyes.

When she came back, she had a present for me. I found myself face-to-face with Ken Hiatt, the boy of my adolescent dreams.

My memory will not let me recall exactly how we found ourselves on the dance floor; nor will it allow me to remember the love song that was playing in the background. However, I do remember how it felt to be in his arms. It was like eating my favorite ice cream, being on a

(continued)

roller coaster and feeling beautiful all at the same time-in short, it was the most wonderful feeling in the world. I was happy.

While we were dancing, I lost all sense of reality. We did not speak, only making eye contact once; the two of us just held each other and glided around on the dance floor.

Soon, the song was over, and we broke apart without a word to each other. I found Katrina, and the moment before I crushed her in a hug, we smiled at each other.

My first slow dance is one of my favorite memories. Ken Hiatt did not like me; we did not become friends after that day, and for all I know, the act was done out of charity. None of that matters. For five minutes, he made me feel like a princess, and for that I am forever indebted to him.

